



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

12 April 2021 (Videoconference)

Web Version

Minute

Present: Alan Johnston, Co-opted Member (Convener)
Frank Armstrong, Co-opted Member
Sarah Cooper, Senate Assessor
Doreen Davidson, General Council Assessor
David Law, Co-opted Member
Ellen MacRae, President, Students' Association
Peter Mathieson, Principal & Vice-Chancellor
Jock Millican, General Council Assessor
Hugh Mitchell, Co-opted Member
Jonathan Seckl, Senior Vice-Principal
Sarah Smith, Vice-Principal Strategic Change & Governance; and
University Secretary

In attendance: Janet Legrand, Senior Lay Member
Leigh Chalmers, Deputy Secretary Governance & Legal
Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students
Lee Hamill, Director of Finance
Gary Jebb, Director of Place
Pauline Manchester, Interim Director of Strategic Planning
Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal (Interim) Corporate Services
James Saville, Director of Human Resources
Lewis Allan, Head of Court Services
Barry Neilson, Director of Strategic Change (for Items 4 and 5)
Gavin McLachlan, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer & Librarian
to the University (for Item 5)
Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead for Equality, Diversity &
Inclusion (for Item 7)
David Gray, Head of School of Biological Sciences (for Item 8)
Mark Parsons, Associate Dean for e-Research, College of Science &
Engineering (for Item 11)

Apologies: None

1 Minute

Paper A1

The Minute of the meeting held on 1 February 2021 was approved.

2 Matters Arising & Review of Action Log

Paper A2

There were no matters arising and the action log was reviewed.

3 Principal's Communications

Verbal

The Principal reported on:

- HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh: the University was privileged by the Duke's close involvement as Chancellor from 1953 to 2010 and the invaluable support provided throughout a near 60 year period in office. Formal condolences have been issued and a celebration of the Duke's life and contribution to the University will be held at a date to be announced.
- Scottish Government Covid-19 public health restrictions: guidance for the higher education sector is awaited for the coming academic year. While it is hoped that a '1 metre plus' series of measures may be allowed the requirement for 2 metre distancing remains in place at present and if it were to continue the amount of in-person teaching possible would be greatly restricted;
- UK Government research funding: cuts to Official Development Assistance funding will have a significant effect on many research projects in the University and in the sector more widely. There are also concerns that the UK's affiliation fees for the EU Horizon 2020 funding programme may be fully or partial met by reducing existing research budgets to the detriment of the sector. A recent announcement that total UK Government spending on research and development will rise to £22bn by per annum by 2024-25 (currently £11.4bn) is welcome but the increase may be focused on defence and industrial research rather than university research;
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC): additional Scottish students admitted in the current year will be funded at the usual Scottish/EU rate for at least their first year of study. More funded places for Scottish students may be made available in the coming academic year – it was noted that SFC funding for Scottish students is not at a self-sustaining level as it requires cross-subsidy;
- COP26 (United Nations Climate Change Conference): the summit is planned to take place in November 2021. The University is continuing to prepare for the conference, with involvement led by Professor David Reay;
- Freedom of Expression: the Principal will participate in a Russell Group board meeting later this afternoon to consider a joint statement on freedom of expression. The University has already published a freedom of expression statement and is supportive of a joint Russell Group statement.

SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS

4 Adaptation & Renewal Team Report

Paper B

A report on the work of the Adaptation and Renewal Team was reviewed. Current public health restrictions allow for no more than 5% of the student population to be on campus. Some relaxations are expected from 26 April and 17 May and this may benefit those students staying in University accommodation or elsewhere in Edinburgh (e.g. allowing a greater number of study spaces on campus to enter into use). The following points were discussed:

- Whether international students arriving for the next academic year may be required to quarantine in Government-mandated hotels or in university accommodation – currently, those arriving have to use Government-mandated hotels but the sector is keen to be able to use university accommodation and

has developed a great deal of experience in managing quarantining students over the past year;

- The potential for exemptions for international students not able to travel to Edinburgh should there be travel restrictions in their home countries – in the present academic year most international students who wished to travel were able to arrive by no later than the end of September with adjustments made for this and it is anticipated that this will apply in the next academic year;
- If vaccine certification may be required by public health authorities – the University would engage in dialogue with the relevant authorities should any proposal be mooted and raise the complexities of any requirements for a highly mobile student population, with medical records often becoming outdated for those who regularly change accommodation and therefore GP practices;
- Staff views on the greater levels of in-person teaching hoped for in the next academic year – this will likely depend on the extent of public health restrictions in place at the time (e.g. if there a ‘1 metre plus’ system) and the level of progress in tackling the pandemic. The University & College Union has an ongoing dispute regarding the right of its members to opt-out of in-person, non-essential activities on campus at present;
- The extent to which parts of the sector may seek to shift permanently to a new teaching and operating model – this has been less evident to date in the UK than in some other parts of the world (e.g. Australia, some US universities); and,
- Research activity has been strong in terms of applications and awards, with research recognised as an essential activity which can take place on campus where appropriate.

5 People & Money System Report

Paper C

An update on the implementation of the People & Money System (the programme delivering the core IT system for HR, Finance, Payroll and Procurement) was considered.

6 Director of Finance’s Report

Paper D

An update on the indicative Quarter Two forecast position, the results of a financial benchmarking exercise against Russell Group peers and a briefing note on developments since the most recent Universities Superannuation Scheme valuation were considered. It was noted that a Planning Round paper will be submitted to the next meeting and will propose a one year income and expenditure budget with the intention that the usual three year planning cycle will resume from the following year. The research income element of the Russell Group financial benchmarking results was discussed, noting that industry income has significantly improved over the last year but given a lag in reporting does not feature in this iteration. It was noted that staff costs as percentage of income match the Russell Group average.

7 Equality Reporting

- EDMARC Staff and Student Reports 2020
- Equality Outcomes 2021-25, and Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Progress Report 2017-21

Paper E1
Paper E2

The annual Equality, Diversity and Research Committee (EDMARC) staff and student data reports and drafts of the Equality Outcomes 2021-2025 and the Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Progress Report 2017-2021 were jointly considered. It was noted that: ethnic diversity has increased in recent years, mainly owing to recruitment of international students and staff; the attainment gap (proportion of undergraduate students achieving a first or upper second class degree by ethnicity) remains a cause for concern; more encouragement for individuals to disclose their protected characteristics would improve the robustness of the data and there is a desire to also improve the presentation of data in future; and, the equality outcomes will have more detailed local plans sitting below them.

Members discussed the following points:

- The attainment gap and its variation at School level – better support for students is key, the curriculum transformation programme will consider if curriculum changes could be of benefit and, more generally, the wider economic impacts of the pandemic may also disproportionately affect minority ethnic students over time and this could impact on attainment (e.g. need to undertake part-time work while studying);
- Support from the Students' Association President for the draft Equality Outcomes and for progressing outcome 1 ('Our staff and students feel confident and are supported to report harassment, hate crime and gender-based violence') as rapidly as possible – it was agreed that this is a high priority;
- Whether there is prioritisation in terms of which protected characteristics should be of most focus at present – the intention is to improve in all areas and also to examine intersections between two or more characteristics;
- Whether the previous outcome of embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do should continue in the next set of outcomes – a feature of the Equality Outcomes format is that previous outcomes cannot be continued into a new reporting cycle but mainstreaming will become a process underpinning the whole approach to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion;
- Whether Outcome 3 ('Increase the diversity of staff, including at senior grades, in leadership roles and on key decision-making bodies') could have associated targets set – these will be actively considered in underpinning work supporting the outcomes; and,
- Developing a narrative for senior leaders to help in building a common mindset on the current position and steps to be taken – to be discussed further.

It was agreed to recommend the papers to Court for approval subject to minor amendment.

8 Gujarat Biotechnology University – Final Agreement

Paper F

A progress update and proposal for a binding Collaboration Agreement to support the development of the Gujarat Biotechnology University (GBU) was reviewed. The Committee indicated continued support for the project and agree to recommend to Court that the University sign a 'Stage 2' binding Collaboration Agreement to govern the 10-year partnership.

9 EUSA Budget 2021/22

Paper G

A budget for the Students' Association for financial year 2021/22 was presented. Members discussed the intention for the Association to operate with an overall deficit of £1.144m (base case) over the year, reflecting the expected continued adverse impact of Covid-19 on revenue generating activities. Discussions are continuing with the University's Finance Department and the Accommodation, Catering & Events subsidiary on future operations and capital prioritisation discussions are also being held within the Association. The importance of Association provided services such as the Advice Place for the benefit of student experience and the University as a whole was noted. Noting that the budget had been approved by the Association's Trustee Board, the Committee was content with the oversight of the annual budget and encouraged work on the longer term recovery plan in discussion with the University to continue at pace.

10 People Report

Paper H

The report was noted and the following points were discussed:

- The gradual relaxation of public health restrictions should allow for more staff currently furloughed to return to work with the scheme continuing until September;
- Negotiations on health and safety aspects of an expected return to campus for many staff later in the calendar year – the return to campus will depend upon work requirements in each area and will follow careful adherence to public health measures; and,
- Whether the new processes mentioned in the paper for supporting new colleagues or those moving to a new role, for staff performance and learning and for helping career development and succession planning could be implemented before the planned August 2022 date – it was confirmed that these will need Phase 3 of the People & Money System to be completed before implementation and given that they cannot be introduced mid-year, August 2022 will be the earliest date, at the start of the 2022/23 academic year.

11 Research Data Scotland

Paper I

Noting the confirmation of underpinning funding from the Scottish Government, approval was granted for the University to join Research Data Scotland as a founding partner and for the appointment of Professor Mark Parsons as the University's Authorised Representative and Trustee of the Charity.

ITEMS FOR NOTING OR FORMAL APPROVAL

12 Estates Small Works Programme Paper J

The Committee agreed to recommend to Court approval of the Small Works Programme Budget allocation for 2021/22 as set out in the paper.

13 Estates Committee Report Paper K

The report was noted.

14 Investment Committee Report Paper L

The report was noted and the recent investment performance welcomed.

15 PRC Commercialisation Sub-Group Report Paper M

The report was noted.

16 PRC People & Money Sub-Group Report Paper N

The report was noted.

17 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

18 Date of Next Meeting & Proposed 2021/22 Meeting Dates

Monday, 31 May 2021, 2.30pm-5pm

The proposed 2021/22 meeting dates were agreed subject to final confirmation:

- Friday 17 September 2021, 2.30pm-5pm
- November 2021 (day and time to be confirmed shortly)
- Monday 31 January 2022, 2.30pm-5pm
- Monday 4 April 2022, 2.30pm-5pm
- Monday 30 May 2022, 2.30pm-5pm